

# Canadian Declaration for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage

Adopted in Quebec City, Canada, May 20th 2016

## Preamble

Some 200 participants met at Laval University in the City of Quebec (Canada), from May 19th to 22nd 2016, at the invitation of the Canada Research Chair in Intangible Cultural Heritage (CRCICH), of the Institute for Cultural Heritage (IPAC), of the Interuniversity Centre for Studies in the Humanities, Arts and Traditions (CELAT), Laval University, of the Quebec Society for Ethnology and of the Canadian Network for Intangible Cultural Heritage (CNICH), for the Annual Meeting of the Folklore Studies Association of Canada (FSAC) and the Canadian Society for Traditional Music (CSTM), two groups which represent the major learned associations in Canada working in the field of intangible cultural heritage. The meeting aimed to celebrate the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the entry into force of the UNESCO *Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage*, now ratified by 168 of the 196 member states of UNESCO. The conference benefited from the financial support of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), the Canadian Commission for UNESCO (CCU), Laval University and the Interdisciplinary Observatory for Creation and Research in Music. The keynote address was given by Timothy Curtis, Secretary of the *Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage* and Chief of the Intangible Cultural Heritage Section of UNESCO. The participants, representing civil society, the federal and the provincial governments, the First Nations, 32 Museums and NGOs in the field of heritage from 7 of the 13 provinces and territories, and 21 Canadian universities, adopt the following Declaration of principles and recommendations intended for the safeguarding, study, development and promotion of the intangible cultural heritage (ICH) across Canada. According to the Convention, ICH is manifested in oral traditions and expressions, performing arts, rituals and festive events, knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe, and traditional craftsmanship. ICH is deemed an innovative and effective means of promoting cultural diversity, human creativity and sustainable development around the world.

This Declaration is part of a long history of safeguarding, of study and of development of Canada's intangible cultural heritage and is also a part of a series of specific measures and actions undertaken in the last few years by the Canadian Network for Intangible Cultural Heritage (CNICH), the Folklore Studies Association of Canada (FSAC), the Canadian Society for Traditional Music (CSTM) and the Canada Research Chair in Intangible Cultural Heritage (CRCICH) for the safeguarding, study and promotion of the intangible cultural heritage. Created in 2013, CNICH, which brings together its members from all parts of the country – several of whom are also active members of FSAC, CSTM and CCU – took part that same year in a symposium in Edmonton, organized by the Alberta Museums Association, on the uses of intangible cultural heritage in museums. On June 3, 2015, CNICH organized a workshop at the Canadian Museum of History with the support of the Canadian Commission for UNESCO whose intention was to take stock on the work being done in Canada on intangible cultural heritage. The 53 participants recommended the organization of a symposium in 2016, and a national survey to identify the organizations involved with heritage to ascertain their interest in intangible heritage, learn of their aspirations in that regard and their desire to have Canada sign the UNESCO *Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage*. Conducted by the Canada Research Chair in Intangible Heritage, the national survey made up of a questionnaire was sent to 842 organizations in Canada and received some 307 responses. The vast majority of those who responded showed great interest in ICH and its usefulness, whether the organizations were involved with tangible or intangible heritage. Moreover, 80% of the organizations are in favour of Canada's ratifying the Convention, 19% are undecided and only 1% against.<sup>1</sup> Canadians, therefore, have spoken strongly in favour of developing the use of ICH, capitalizing on its potential and becoming a party to the UNESCO Convention on ICH.

The participants at this symposium address the present Declaration to all governments, intergovernmental organizations, to national and local authorities, as well as to all institutions and specialists qualified to

engage through legislation, practices, policies and planning, in addition to management strategies with a view to better safeguarding and promoting intangible cultural heritage.

## Recommendations

1. Considering its history as well as the extensive and growing interest in intangible cultural heritage, in all of Canada's heritage actors, as clearly shown in the national survey, and witnessed by the great enthusiasm expressed all across Canada toward this symposium; given that the Convention aims to ensure the viability, recreation and transmission of living traditions, and thus heighten both their recognition and safeguarding; considering that ICH is fragile because dependant on transmission by human beings; considering that Canadians want to fully participate in the Convention and that it is an efficient means of promoting cultural diversity and sustainable development, we ask the Government of Canada to sign the UNESCO *Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage* in 2017 as its legacy to Canadians in celebration of the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Confederation.

2. Given that, at present, with the exception of Quebec and Newfoundland, there exist neither in Canada nor its provinces and territories policies and a legal framework to protect the intangible cultural heritage, we strongly encourage the Government of Canada and those in the provinces, territories and municipalities to develop policies and adopt new laws to target the safeguarding, transmission and study of the intangible cultural heritage.

3. Because of the transformations and breakdowns in societies caused by climate change, mass tourism, and urban development, we need to better understand the threats so as to take preventive measures and plan for sustainable remedies. We recommend that governmental and non-governmental organizations, heritage associations, both local and regional, develop strategic plans in collaboration with scholars in intangible heritage and experts in cultural diversity and sustainable development to better safeguard intangible cultural heritage. In the same way, both residents and local authorities must be made aware of the need for safeguarding so as to develop a sense of belonging to place and deal with threats caused by changes in the world of today.

4. Considering the fact that digital technologies (digital data bases, websites, mobile applications) make it possible to rapidly and efficiently constitute multimedia inventories of intangible cultural heritage online and provide efficient tools for the safeguarding and interpretation of ICH, we strongly recommend using them to better preserve, identify, study and disseminate this heritage. These technologies facilitate the diversity and ongoing renewal of documentation dealing with the intangible cultural heritage.

5. Because intangible cultural heritage is handed down through persons and that transmission is essential in its safeguarding, we declare that the participation of the communities is essential to all safeguarding measures of intangible cultural heritage.

6. Recognizing that intergenerational and cross-cultural transmission are important aspects in the safeguard, recreation and dissemination of intangible cultural heritage, we recommend including younger generations and various cultural groups as participants in the development of policies and in the management of intangible cultural heritage.

7. Due to the fact that intangible cultural heritage is especially threatened within indigenous groups and to follow the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, we recommend that they be given priority consideration in the formulation of policies and safeguarding measures.

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<sup>1</sup> See the summary of the results of the survey on the FSAC Website: <http://www.acef-fsac.ulaval.ca>  
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